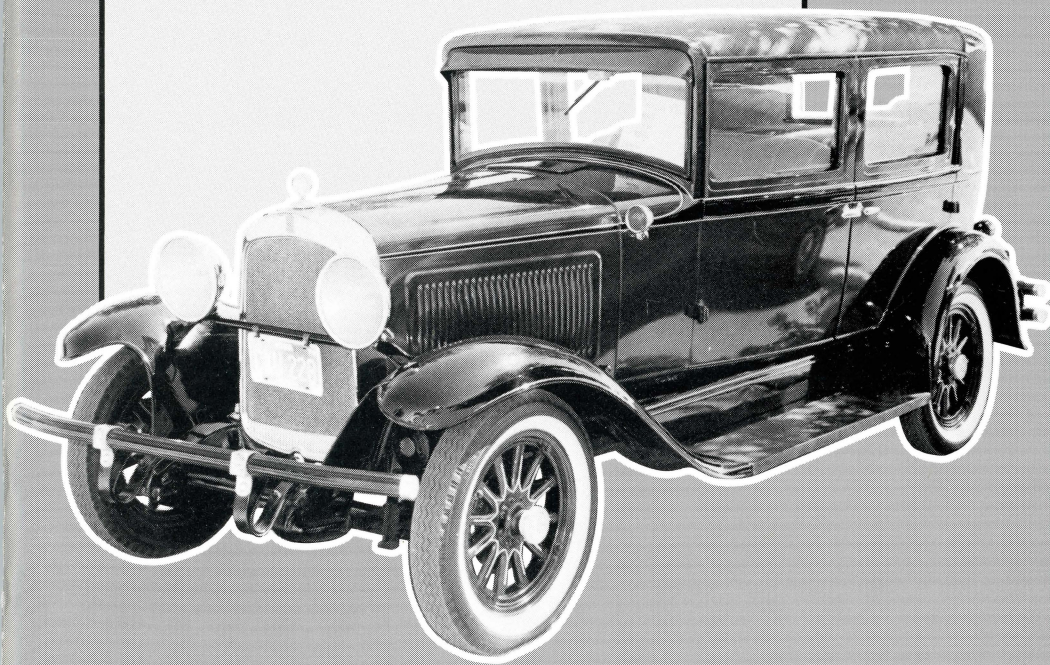


J. J. Stuursma

— *A Biography* —

by J. P. Dahm
1991



"Gloeiende Mijn Whippet!"

D. Van Kooten

J. J. Stuursma

— A Biography —



"Gloeende Mijn Whippet!"

This is a true story of a man who immigrated with his family in 1906 from the poverty conditions of The Netherlands to the New World. It is a story of a man who enjoyed life, his family, and who had a great devotion to his Creator. One of his enjoyments was the power and speed of the automobile. Pictured above is a Whippet Sedan similar to one that he owned at one time.



J.J. and Dirkje Stuursma, son, John and daughter, Effie,
soon after arriving in Iowa in 1906.

Eke Goudberg Postma,
mother of Dirkje. Holland.



The house in Engwierum,
Friesland, from which
the Stuursma's emigrated
to America in 1906.



Cornelius and
Sjoukje Spoelstra
(sister of Dirkje),
who Stuursma's sponsored
to America in 1913.



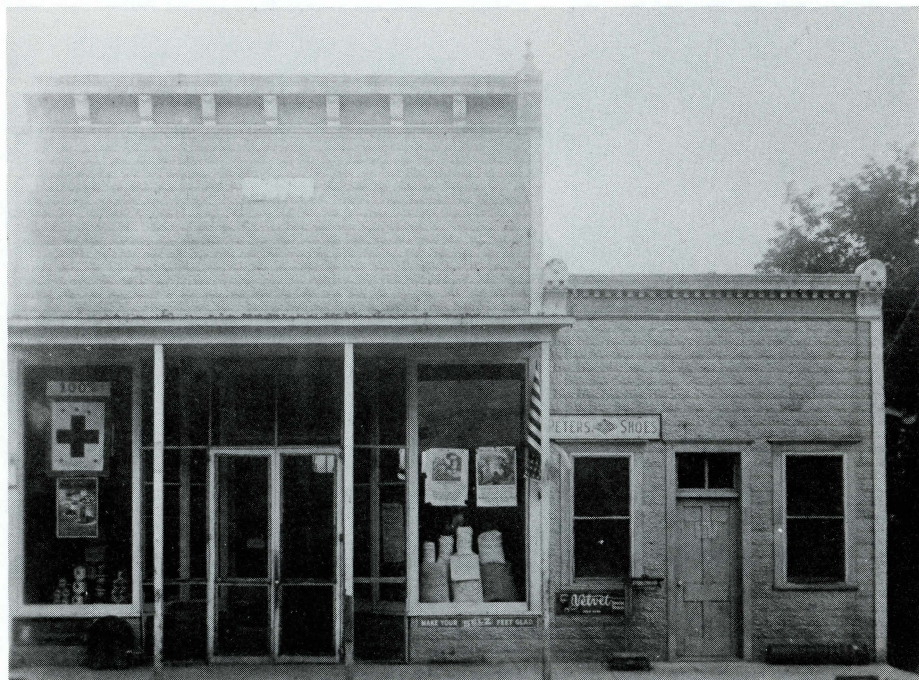
*J.J. Stuursma and business partner Mart Van Der Molen (at the wheel).
Peoria store 1915.*



*J.J. Stuursma and
Charlie Vos (cream tester).
Peoria store 1914-1924.*



*Peoria Store about 1920
Anna (Stuursma) Vander Schaaf, Effie (Stuursma) Dahm, clerks*



Peoria Store, J.J. Stuursma, proprietor, 1918.



*Mr. and Mrs. Stuursma,
Peoria home about 1935.*



*Dirkje and her four daughters: Effie (Dahm), Ella (Andringa)
Janet (Andringa), and Bertha (Roose) at the Peoria home. About 1942.*



*Mr. and Mrs. Stuursma,
Pella, Iowa About 1946.*



*Mr. and Mrs. Charlie
Stuursma (brother of J.J.)*



*The "Dump House"
on Hazel Street in Pella.
Mr. and Mrs. Stuursma
and Lubbert Kooistra,
nephew of Dirkje.
Lubbert's mother and
Dirkje were sisters.*



The Dodge was left undamaged in the explosion fire in 1956.



Remains of the house on Franklin Street after the explosion fire in 1956.



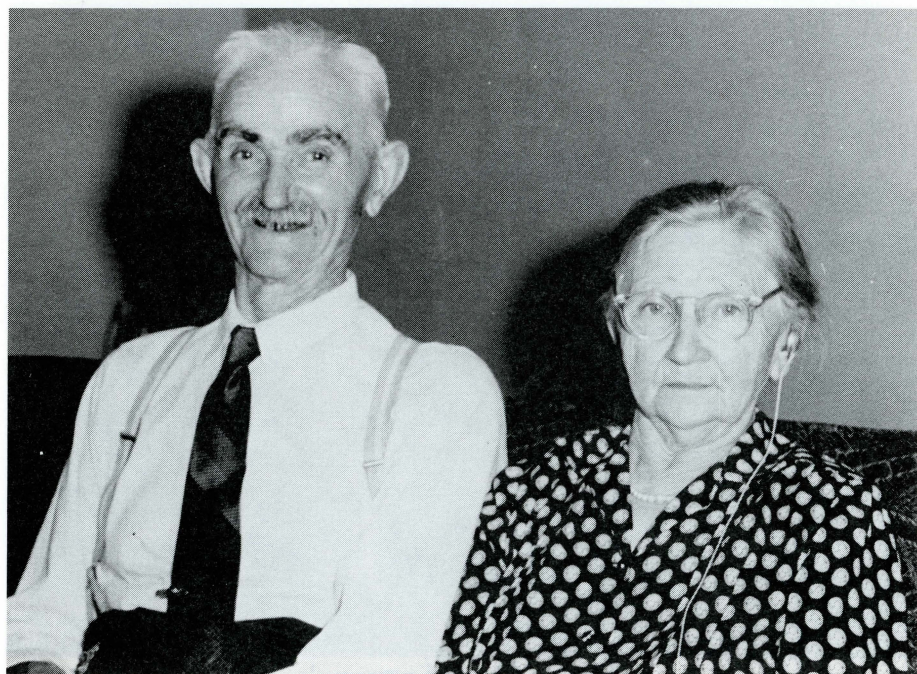
*J.J. and Dirkje Stuursma
Fifty-fifth Wedding Anniversary - May 15, 1952.*



*Mr. and Mrs. Stuursma's
Fifty-fifth Wedding Anniversary - May 15, 1952.*



The newly rebuilt home on ^{Franklin} Hazel Street following the explosion fire.
Gerrit Andringa, painter.



Sixtieth Wedding Anniversary - May 15, 1957.



J.J. and Dirkje retirement years.

JAN J. (J.J.) STUURSMA - A BIOGRAPHY

This is a true story of the life of Jan Stuursma. It is written, as far as can be determined, accurate in every detail. It is a story of a man who was Dutch, but even more than Dutch, he was Frisian!

Stuursma is a name spelled with either one or two "u's." In Holland it is spelled "Stuursma." The Dutch immigrants to America gradually dropped one "u" to spell it "Stursma." In this story the Dutch spelling will be used to retain the original.

An unanswered question exists about the middle initial "J" in Jan Stuursma's name. Immigration papers in Washington D.C., which asked for the full name of the immigrant, list it only as Jan Stuursma. In America, however, the "J" is usually present. Some say that the "J" was inserted to make a distinction between himself and his cousin Jan W. Stuursma. Others say that Jan himself said that his middle initial was real and stood for Jans. It is true that in Holland the middle initial "J" was already present because Jan had a tattoo placed on his hand between the thumb and the second finger which read J.J.! In any case, he was known in America as Jan (John) or J.J.

Jan J. Stuursma, the son of Jan Stuursma and Elkje Hiemstra, was born December 9, 1874 in Munnikezyl, Friesland, The Netherlands. He was united in marriage to Dirkje Postma (Postema) on May 15, 1897 at Kollum, Friesland at age twenty-two. Dirkje was also born in Munnikezyl on March 26, 1875. She was the daughter of Lubbert and Eke Goudberg Postma.

Life in Holland

Two children were born to the couple in Holland. The first was a son Jan (John), born August 12, 1898, and the second was a daughter Eke (Effie), born April 23, 1901. Life was difficult in Holland as the family lived in quite severe poverty. John said his occupation was that of a "vogel vanger" or bird catcher - one who caught and sold birds. He also talked of working hard in the dirt to "grub stumps."

Despite the poverty conditions in Holland, there were also fun times. Dirkje later told her children how she, as a young girl, enjoyed ice skating on the canals. The boys would fold their hands behind them as the girls would push them around on the ice.

Very little is known about their early life in Holland. Jan, it appears, was not always a good and upright young man. In fact, some of the early years were known to be rough. Kroegen (taverns) were plentiful in Holland and with the drinking came the rough language and the pranks.

At some point during his teen years, however, a change took place within him which was lasting. Jan claims that he was converted at the age of seventeen. Upon his visit to the elders of the church for profession of faith, he was requested to return after adequate time had passed in order for him to prove his sincerity.

Jan realized that his past life was not praiseworthy. He admitted that had he not repented and calmed down his life, he would never have gotten his wife! Dirkje later in life told her daughters that it was not unusual for Jan to pray with her during their courtship.

Now a member of the church, Jan became active. His love of music and his talented tenor voice were put to use as he led the zangkoor (choir). Soon after, he was leading Men's Society in the church. Jan conversed easily and was fluent with his speaking. He was told that he should think seriously of becoming a preacher!

Effie remembers that the young family lived in a house with a partition. The house was located in Engwierum, Friesland. Her family lived in the one side while her Uncle William Stuursma and Aunt Hieka lived on the other side. William was a half brother to Jan. Hieka was a full sister of Dirkje! This family had four children: Klassa, Lubbert, Jan and Eeka. It is of interest that at the time of this writing, eighty-four years later, that the same house continues to be owned and lived in by a Stuursma family!

This home was located near a "molen" (windmill) as well as near the "sloot" (canal). The story is told of how the young girl Eke ventured too close to the sloot and fell in. Her brother Jan heard her screams and ran for his mother. Dirkje came just in time to rescue her daughter who was nearly submerged, holding on to the sides with her hands.

It would be difficult to understand what the occupation of "vogel vanger" would be without some explanation. Jan talked about this in an article written thirty-two years later in The Pella Chronicle. This newspaper had a weekly series during the 1930's entitled, "Weekly Visits With Friends in Town and Country" in which one or two correspondents would drive out to interview a local town or country resident.

The date of this interview with J.J. Stuursma was July 7, 1938. the following was written:

In Holland Mr. Stuursma was engaged in the selling of birds, more noted for their wildness than tameness. These were caught in nets and sold for food. He tells of one kind of bird, which had its habitation high up in the air. These birds whistled like a boy or man. Hollanders mastered the art of capturing them. The procedure was to whistle as they did, and seeing the decoys on the ground, thinking they were other birds, they would come to earth and fall in the net prepared for them.

Other birds, used principally by millionaires in the United States, were sold for 50 cents each in American money. Once he sold a pair of these for \$1.50 each, which he thought was some money, as scarce as it was in those days.

Wild geese were also caught in nets and thousands of them were shipped to the United States, Mr. Stuursma having a large share in it. He explains that the best time to catch geese was at night. They lived on the water. The nets were cast in the water, and when the tide came in the geese would come with it. Being too dark to see where they were going, they fell in the net and remained there until taken out the next morning. It was not necessary to go very early in the morning either, he says, for when once in there they were there to stay. He says the best time for capturing them was during an electrical storm, when the lightening prevented them from seeing where they were going.

Immigration

Living conditions in Holland were not good. Jan and his wife contemplated leaving their country with their family as so many others had done. It would involve moving to a strange land over the ocean, thousands of miles away, leaving their fathers, mothers, relatives and friends behind, knowing that in all probability they would never see them again.

After about nine years of married life in Holland, Jan and Dirkje Stuursma left their homeland and their Gereformeerde Kerk and immigrated to America in March of 1906 with their children Jan (John), age seven and Eke (Effie), age four.

The exodus must have been painful. Dirkje reflected on this when her daughters were growing up. She said, "Don't ever do what I did, leaving my parents behind, never to see them again." Perhaps the parting was most painful to Dirkje's parents and especially to her mother for she had said, "I would rather bury my daughter than to see her leave for America!"

Jan, himself, could not afford the trip. He stated years later though, that at one time in Holland he had a good catch of birds which made the trip remotely possible. However, it was his cousin, John W. Stuursma, who became his sponsor and paid his passage to America.

John arrived with his wife Dirkje, two children, the clothes on his back, thirty dollars in his pocket, a deep abiding faith in His Lord and a dream of a better life. Destination: Leighton, Iowa, United States of America.

The National Archives in Washington D.C. have provided a considerable amount of information on the immigration. The family is listed as Jan Stuursma, age thirty, Dirkje Stuursma, age thirty, Jan Stuursma, age seven, Eke Stuursma, age four, sailing from Rotterdam on March 10, 1906 in the SS Statendam, and arriving at the port of New York on March 22, 1906. The father's calling or occupation is listed as a laborer. All are listed as able to read and write except Eeke. The last residence in Holland is listed as Munnekezyl and the final destination is Leighton, Iowa, also having a ticket to such place. It is also stated that the passage was paid by a cousin Jan Stuursma (John W. Stuursma). It is assumed that John W. paid the passage to America and the passage to Leighton.

Answers to these questions were as follows:

How much money or possession at the part of arrival? "Thirty dollars."

Ever in prison or stockhouse? "No."

Ever in an institution for the care and treatment of the insane? "No."

Ever supported by charity? "No."

Whether a polygamist or whether an anarchist? - the answer by Jan Stuursma was "No!"

As to the condition of health, mental and physical, the answer was "Good."

Are you deformed or crippled? "No."

The trip from New York to Iowa was made by train. It was cousin John W. who provided lodging for them in their home in Leighton for the first two weeks. J.J. said later on in life that when he immigrated to America he was so poor that he arrived in Leighton with only forty cents in his pocket!

Stranger in a Strange Land

With the assistance of John W., a house was found in Leighton. It was located about two blocks south of where the Leighton Christian Reformed Church now stands. The Leighton community would be their home for about five years.

J.J. found work as a farm hand near Leighton working for Bart Groenendyke. The Groenendykes had lived in America for some time and by now had acquired some land. J.J. also obtained a side job as janitor of the Leighton Christian Reformed Church.

But it was not easy adjusting to the new culture. Everything was so "Amerikaanze" - the neighbors, the teacher, and even the doctor. J.J. was finally heard to say, "Ik wil terug naar Nederland; het is zo vreemd hier." To this son John replied, "Ik ook."

The Stuursmas gradually adjusted to their new and different environment. The Dutch-like atmosphere of the Leighton community certainly made the language barrier a less difficult one.

Effie remembers two "Amerikaanze" sisters, known as the Fry sisters, who lived next door. These two unmarried ladies were very accommodating and friendly. They had expressed a desire to go to the Dutch church and said they would come if they could understand but one word of Dutch! There were no English speaking churches in Leighton at the time.

Tragedy Strikes

In August of that first summer of 1906 the family went to Pella to attend the Zendings Feest, or Mission Fest, held by the churches. Presumably the trip was made with a friend's horse and buggy as the Stuursma's had no means for such luxuries.

Some days later their eight year old son John became seriously ill. The diagnosis made by the Leighton doctor was the dreaded disease diphtheria. This led to a mandatory quarantine of the Stuursma home. The parents suspected that the disease was picked up in the crowd at the Zendings Feest.

John's condition worsened. On the day of his death, September 1, 1906, he asked that his father come in from chopping wood. He requested that his parents close the shades and darken his room. He also requested that his father pray because he was going to be with Jesus. His mother asked, "Wouldn't you rather stay here with me and Pa?" His reply was, "I want to be with Jesus." His death followed almost immediately. With no funds available and with the home under quarantine, there was no funeral. The undertaker took the body directly from the home to the Black Oak (Van Domselaar) Cemetery east of Pella for burial. None of the family attended the burial. Poverty prohibited a gravestone or a marker, and to this day the exact location in the cemetery cannot be determined.

Records at the Mahaska County Courthouse state the following:

Date of birth of John J. Stuursma - August 12, 1898. Born in Holland.
Date of death - September 1, 1906. Cause of death - diphtheria.
Undertaker J. B. McCurdy of Oskaloosa. Age eight years and twenty days. Attending Physician L. C. Howe of Leighton.

The family was cast into the depths of sorrow. For Dirkje it was a burden almost too heavy to bear. Here, a stranger in a strange land, with no sisters or mother to support her, she was to bear it alone with her husband. The experience seemed to have a saddening effect upon her which she carried throughout her lifetime.

The Farmer of Leighton

After some time the Stuursma family moved to another house located about one mile south of Leighton. Effie called it the place "on the other side of the tracks." It seems that J.J. continued to work as a farm hand. From here they moved to a location about two and one half miles east and south of Leighton to what Effie would later call "the coal mine house" since it was adjacent to a coal mine. It was here that Elkje (Ella) was born on January 12, 1909. By this time J.J. had a horse and buggy, and fortunately so, because he had to get Dr. Howe from Leighton for the delivery. J.J. had said it was so terribly cold in the buggy that he almost froze his hands!

Effie remembers walking the two miles from here to school in Leighton and each time crossing the railroad tracks. This frightened her! The food in her lunch bucket wasn't always so good either! Instead of butter on the bread, it was lard! The sandwich often landed in the ditch on the way home from school. The empty lunch bucket, of course, made her mother happy. Effie says she never told her mother the truth about the empty lunch bucket!

Moving to Peoria

About 1911 the family left the Leighton area and moved to a farm about two and one half miles south and east of Peoria, Iowa to what was later called the Jonker Place. This was J.J.'s first opportunity to rent a farm, which he did, from Martin J. De Jong, the owner.

It was here also that on October 15, 1913, their third daughter Janet was born. By this time Effie and Ella were old enough to help out with the family work. On this occasion, however, when the physician arrived, the girls were sent upstairs while Dr. Ryan from New Sharon provided his professional services.

Effie remembers helping with the farm work, especially the chores and the milking. There was "Rooie Dine" (Red Dena) - the good old cow who was everyone's favorite. She was so "mak" (tame). One of it's nipples was injured, but with the three that were left it provided an ample supply of good milk.

It was also here on the Jonker place that the Stuursmas inherited some money. It seems that the two hundred dollars came from a single uncle of Dirkje, a Goudberg, who lived in North Dakota. This was J.J.'s opportunity to buy some pigs which he did with all of the money. The story ended in a sad way because all of the pigs died of disease, presumably cholera.

John and his family had now lived in America for seven years. He remembered how his cousin John W. had helped him when he immigrated. Now, in 1913, John had the opportunity to sponsor his wife's sister and her husband Cornelius and Sjoukje Spoelstra as they made their way with their eight children to their new homeland. The family stayed with the Stuursmas for a few weeks here on the Jonker place as they helped them establish themselves here in America.

The Merchant of Peoria

Perhaps farming was too much work or perhaps the income was not good enough, whatever the case, J.J. became interested in the Peoria Store. The store was jointly owned by Bill Van Dusseldorp and Rut Kaldenberg. This led to J.J.'s purchase of Van Dusseldorp's share of the store in 1914.

This necessitated another move by the Stuursma family, this time from the Jonker place to an old house in Peoria. On this lot Henry Dahm later built his house. The time of the move was probably 1914.

Rut Kaldenberg and J.J. ran the store together but only for a short time. The relationship was not the smoothest, and soon Rut sold his share to Mart Vander Molen.

Stuursma and Vander Molen operated the store together for about one year. In 1915 they purchased a Ford truck with which Vander Molen would pick up eggs and deliver groceries. J.J. was impressed with the performance of the Ford, as he spun its wheels and said of its power, "It throws the rocks from out under!"

About 1916 J.J. became the sole proprietor of the store. Several clerks are remembered to have worked in the store during these years; Nellie Bulthuis, Effie (Stuursma) Pothoven, Anna

(Stuursma) Vander Schaaf, Jeanette (Vos) Nibbelink and J.J.'s daughter Effie. Daughter Ella began working in the store at the young age of sixteen just after her father had sold out to Jake and Henry. Ella remembers working for one dollar per day and not being able to see her wages because the money was applied to her father's grocery bill!

Effie Dahm vividly remembers the days when the Gypsies would come around with an old jalopy and steal merchandise. They would travel around the county and camp by the Skunk River. One Gypsy would keep the clerk busy while the other one was active in thievery.

Herm Vos began working in the store for J.J. in 1919 after the war was over. Herm ran the Model T Ford truck for the store. Groceries would come from Taintor, Oskaloosa, or Pella, but at this time (1919) Herm would get the groceries from H. L. Spencer in Oskaloosa and would bring the eggs and poultry to Rynsberger in Oskaloosa. The cream went to Pella. Herm was also the cream tester for J.J.

About 1915 the Stuursmas moved into the house down the hill east from the store. This was a convenient location not only for J.J. but for Effie as well, who was helping with the clerking. It was also in this house that their last child was born. Dr. Ryan was called but he was too late. Bertha arrived on May 22, 1918 with J.J. Stuursma being the physician! When the doctor did arrive the baby was already born. J.J. said one good thing about it was that he didn't have to pay the doctor for the delivery!

The War Years

The war years of 1917 and 1918 were difficult years for J.J. as well as the other Dutch people in the Peoria, New Sharon and Sully areas. The Dutch people became the objects of a considerable amount of harassment. They spoke a language similar to the German language, and were consequently called "Pro-German." When Iowa Governor William L. Harding gave his questionable "Language Proclamation" prohibiting the use of any language but English in public places, the harassment became much worse. It was especially difficult for J.J. who was in business.

The Dutch were spied upon in the store as well as being listened to on the party telephone line to hear if any Dutch was spoken. If Dutch was spoken the offending party would find his mailbox painted yellow, or yellow paint was smeared on the barn.

Effie, then a clerk in the store at age seventeen remembers, "People would come in the store periodically and stand around to observe if any Dutch was being spoken. You couldn't speak a word of Dutch in the store!" "But," says Effie with tongue in cheek, "we did it anyway!"

J.J. spoke of these difficult years in the July 7, 1938 interview with The Pella Chronicle. The article states:

Mr. Stursma had other problems during the war period. After the government had issued an edict that foreign languages were not to be used in schools and public assemblies, there were those who had the idea that the Dutch language should not be spoken at all. He was therefore, criticized for talking to customers in that language. He says, "I thought what difference does it make whether I sell a person coffee or sugar in the Dutch or the English language."

Continuing, Mr. Stursma said, "We had some old ladies here who could not talk the English language or understand the speaking of it. And when they don't understand it, you can't make them understand it!" It was on account of being in business and having to deal with so many people that Mr. Stursma soon learned the language of his adopted country.

In 1917, James Hietbrink came to be the principal of the Peoria Christian School. Feelings were running high, and the school more and more became the issue on which bitter hatred centered.

Mr. Hietbrink was singled out for threatening and violence. One evening in May of 1918, as he walked home from the Peoria store with a supply of groceries, a young man, Les Allen, waylaid him from behind, knocked him to the ground and inflicted a brutal beating upon him. Soon after the beating of Hietbrink, the Christian school was closed for fear of destruction by fire.

The primary object of the hostilities and hatred of the "Amerikaanze" people in the Peoria area, however, was Rev. Weersing, the minister of the Peoria Christian Reformed

Church. The hatred toward Rev. Weersing was so intense that a mob was determined to hang him. Accountable witnesses state that "the rope was ready." However, Weersing and his family were secretly taken away by a car to Prairie City.

The mob then threatened to burn the town completely to the ground. Jeanette (Vos) Nibbelink, who was working for J.J. in the store, remembers her mother burying their treasure in the garden for protection. J.J. was afraid for his life during these terrible times, and he slept with the "410" under the bed. By the grace of God the planned attack did not occur. However, late in the evening of June 13, 1918, about 11:30 p.m., the Christian school was set on fire. Soon the fire spread to the church as well. The flames could be easily seen from Stuursma's home, and soon the whole town was awake. Volunteers worked late in the night and morning hours pouring buckets of water on the parsonage roof to prevent its loss.

The harassment continued for J.J. to the very end of the war. Sometime in November of 1918, a group of drunken brawlers came late in the evening to the Stuursma home. "Come on John! Come on John! The war is over! The war is over!," they hollered. They wanted boxes for a bonfire and food to eat out of the store. J.J. questioned whether the war was really over so he called "Central" about it on the telephone. He received no definite answers. The tensions were running high and John was afraid for his life. He was in tears as he called his brother Charlie for help. (Charlie lived on the John Van Gorp place.)

To avoid the road, Charlie walked through the field to John's back door to aid his brother. By now the rowdy men had found enough boxes and chicken crates on their own and started a large bonfire by the store.

John may well have wondered why all this had to be. Why did I immigrate twelve years ago to this "free" country to face these problems which I did not cause? He never expressed himself about it.

The tensions gradually lessened as the months passed by. The armistice was signed in November of 1918.

J.J. Buys a Farm

J.J. continued in the Peoria Store until 1924, for a total of ten years. But during this time in 1921 he bought a two hundred acre farm one mile west of Peoria for sixteen thousand dollars or eighty dollars per acre. He never lived on the place, but he drove there frequently while daughter Effie and Anna of Coen would run the store. J.J. helped consistently with the planting of the corn and field work. He didn't participate in the milking or any of the chores, not even harnessing the horses. He had his favorite team to take to the field, and that team was supposed to be harnessed and ready to go when he arrived in the morning! J.J. never drove the tractor.

Finally in 1924 J.J. sold the store to the Dahm brothers, Jake and Henry. Soon a romance blossomed between his daughter Effie and Jake. In 1925 the two were married!

The Stuursmas had now lived in America for about twenty years. While no one would call the family wealthy, the years of poverty as endured in Holland were over. J.J. had been in business for ten years. He was now in the process of buying a two hundred acre farm, and he was about to build a new house. The house he lived in was sold with the store to Jake and Effie.

In 1926, at the age of fifty-two, J.J. built his new house located about one block south of the store. It was a new house, but as was often the case, J.J. found a cheaper way to do it. He traveled to Camp Dodge where he bought second hand lumber which had been used in the barracks of the World War. Consequently, to the rest of the family the wood was rough and not entirely satisfactory, especially for the doors and floors. He and cousin Coen did some of the foundation work and tiling by hand. The house had some of the modern conveniences including running water. The water tank was located upstairs with a gravity flow system. They had to be very careful when filling the tank so it would not overflow.

Working by hand, however, wasn't really J.J.'s most favorite thing to do. This was evidenced by the fact that when he bought the farm, he never lived on it himself. Likewise, in the store he would frequently leave his clerks to run it! J.J. would say, "You

got to work with your head!," or in his native tongue he would say, "Ye moet je kop laten werken en het uitprakkezeeren hoe je leven to maaken!"

Perhaps his attitude was influenced by his early life in Holland where he said he worked so hard and never had enough to eat. "I don't even want to go back to visit," he said.

But in spite of this talk, J.J. also did his share of physical work. He enjoyed gardening for many years, turning over all the spades of dirt by hand. He raised all of his own potatoes even into his advanced years. His grandchildren made a good audience watching his gardening skills. When it came to cutting up the seed potatoes, however, it was such particular business that only he could do it just right!

J.J. also tore down the old barn located in the pasture by the store. The barn was used for the cow, and it housed chickens that came in from the farmers. He took down the barn, board by board, injuring his back when a wall fell in, but saved the used lumber for other purposes.

Cars, Fishing and Fun

J.J. and Dirkje lived in their new house in Peoria from 1926-1945. During these years he kept very busy going to the farm, taking care of his garden, driving his car, fishing in the Skunk River and spending time with his grandchildren. His grandchildren became very fond of him with all the kidding and teasing that went on. A special fondness developed with grandsons Gelmar Andringa and James Dahm because he taught them all of their driving skills on the Skunk River bottom as they drove the manual transmission V-8 Ford. (He called it the "Fee Eight") To top it off, every trip to the river bottom ended up at the river for some fishing which could be as often as three to four times a week.

This V-8 Ford was a favorite of his, and he did not brag about it just a little! On one occasion he came from Pella with his "Fee Eight" and passed up another car. When he arrived home he said, "I passed up a car on my way to Peoria, and I haven't seen him since!"

Altogether, J.J. owned several cars - always used ones. He had a Model T Ford, a four door Dodge Sedan, a Whippet Sedan, a '37 Ford and finally a Dodge Coupe. This was the car that he said just went "a flying!" It seemed, however, that the Whippet Sedan gave him his greatest enjoyment. The Whippet cars were four or six-cylinder cars, made by Willys Company from 1927-1931 to compete with Ford and Chevrolet. When proudly referring to this car he would say "Gloeiede mijn Whippet!" Upon occasion, however, when the old thing didn't run so well, it became "Gloeiede ezel mijn Whippet!!" J.J. never had a driver's license.

The summer mornings usually included some fishing in the "Skunk" with the fish trap, a contraption made with chicken wire into which was placed chicken guts for bait. Most mornings there would be at least one or more Catfish, Carp or Buffalo trapped in his illegal contraption. When the supply of fish exceeded his needs he would distribute them to his four daughters and their families. Cleaning the fish was done quite easily with a pair of pliers or preferably a pincers. The skin would come off with the scales in the cleaning process. Again, it was such particular business that only he could do it just right! The cost of a fishing license was never a problem. He just never bought one.

Passing the time in the winter often involved some checker playing. The Dutch were fond of their checker game, and loafers were often found in front of the pot-bellied stove in the Peoria Store playing checkers. J.J. also did his share of playing. When the times were tough and checkers were scarce, white and pink peppermints made good substitutes!

Pipe smoking, cigar smoking and a little tobacco chewing were favorite pastimes for J.J., as they were for so many in that day. It seems that "Summer Time" was the favorite brand of tobacco whether for the pipe or the chew. To Dirkje it was a smelly deplorable nuisance and a major source of irritation. The pipe was kept on the little table by his chair as well as the worn thin pocket knife used to clean it. Dirkje complained about it a lot, but J.J. shrugged it off and would simply say "Ah - the old lady!"

Along side his pipe lay a very interesting utensil used for eating, namely his own personal fork, which, it is believed, was brought along from Holland. The fork and J.J. were inseparable as it was the only one he would eat with. It was worn at a diagonal angle after all the years of use so it was also easily recognized. Again, Dirkje voiced her disapproval but to no avail. For fear of it being lost or taken away, J.J. would not allow it to go into the dishpan. He simply wiped it clean after a meal and laid it aside by his pipe where it was ready for the next meal.

J.J. very much enjoyed the time spent at the table during mealtime. It was without a doubt the best part of his day. It also gave him the opportunity to communicate with his grandchildren if they were present. He would love to tell them that they were putting their food under their nose and not in their stomachs! Another trick was to accuse them of cleaning their plate by putting their food under the table! Then there was this question, "And what are we going to do tomorrow? Go to the farm!" The kids were delighted. At the farm was a pony and a pony cart!

J.J. had his favorite foods. He ate them over and over and Dirkje was always there to fix them - such as karnemelkse pap (buttermilk pap made with barley and stroop) and tarwe brood met boter en kaas. Anyone who had ever eaten Dirkje's graham brood made with cracked wheat and eaten with butter and cheese admitted that there was absolutely nothing else ever made that tasted that good!

Other favorites of his were aardappels (potatoes), ciples (onions), speck (bacon) and sla (cabbage). Mustard often went on the potatoes and Dirkje had the recipe for the homemade mustard. It may not be difficult to detect that J.J. had a very keen sense of humor. He often played his practical jokes on his grandchildren. On one occasion it is remembered how he asked his five year old grandson at the dinner table if he could see the bird sitting in the window. With the young fellow distracted, he quickly snatched "een stukje vlees" from his plate. With no bird to be seen he would quickly say the bird flew away!

Coming from Holland the couple was, of course, fluent in the Dutch language. This was their first language and easiest one. But John also knew the Fries language and it gave him much

delight to speak Fries. Dirkje could not speak or understand the language and became irritated when her husband went on in this foreign tongue. Finally when her patience wore thin she would simply say, "Hou toch op met je ouwe Fries!" J.J. would chuckle back and grin.

Medical Problems

J.J. developed a serious medical problem which burdened him for many years. The very severe pain was finally diagnosed as coming from his gall bladder. Despite the home remedies which went on for quite a long time, J.J. had to go to the Mercy Hospital in Oskaloosa in the spring of 1945 where old Doc Williams did the operating. It was serious, and there was real concern for his life. The gall bladder could not be removed because of the infection but the gall stones were removed. J.J. recovered remarkably well, and after a stay in the hospital, he returned home.

Dirkje too had her problems, but this occurred much earlier - about 1920. The pain was severe - acutely severe! Doc Bartlett was called from New Sharon. Dirkje was rushed to Mercy Hospital in Oskaloosa where Doc Williams did the surgery. It was an appendix which had already ruptured - a condition from which most people died. Dirkje made a remarkable recovery, and after a stay in the hospital of three weeks she returned to her home.

Religious Life

Many things can be said and written about J.J. Stuursma - his wit and humor, his likes and dislikes, his personality traits and the like, but the part of his life which took precedence over all the rest was his deep and abiding faith and his devotion to his Lord. Many hours were spent in reading de Hollandse Bijbel and in leading the family in prayer. De Wachter was also read as well as De Toekomst. Theological discussions were not the exception, but the rule, over subjects deep in nature.

It came about providentially that each of J.J.'s four son-in-laws fit in well with the family because the sermon subjects and the articles in the church papers could be discussed unendingly on

Sunday afternoons, Sunday evenings, holidays or anytime. As a grandson I can well remember "the men" sitting in the living room of Grandpa's house discussing these "deep" subjects relating to the faith. The problem for us as grandchildren was that the language was all Dutch and we could understand only bits of it.

One of the subjects discussed in those days had to do with the controversy over common grace. This came about when Dominie Herman Hoeksma was deposed from the Christian Reformed Church in 1924 in what became the beginning of the Protestant Reformed Church.

Now it is interesting that mention is again made of cousin John W. Stuursma. It was John W. who in 1906 had aided the Stuursmas in immigrating to America. Since then, John W. had moved to Michigan to live and to find work. Conditions were, however, not so good in Michigan for making a livelihood, and after a period of time he returned to Pella. While in Michigan he became involved in the Protestant Reformed Church movement, and upon his return to Pella used his influence on his cousin J.J.. John and Dirkje left the Peoria Christian Reformed Church in 1929 to join the Protestant Reformed Church in Pella where he was soon installed as elder.

J.J. likewise used his influence on his family and in 1930 his son-in-law to be, Gerrit Andringa, joined the "Protestants" as well as Jake and Effie Dahm who joined the same year. But the membership with the "Protestants" lasted only a few years. J.J. and Dirkje returned to the Peoria Christian Reformed Church early in 1935. Jake and Gerrit and their families did likewise late in 1935.

It seemed that Rev. John Weidenaar was one of John's favorite preachers. Weidenaar was the Peoria pastor from 1932-1936. During this time Weidenaar would frequently walk to the Stuursma home on Monday mornings to discuss the Sunday sermons. J.J., of course, did not object to this at all for he was very free with his comments about the preaching. Dirkje would have the coffee pot on, and J.J. would have some freshly dug potatoes ready for the preacher. Weidenaar, as he arrived, was ready for the comments. "Wat dacht je van de preek Stuursma?" the Dominee would ask. "Ach, je hebt er een potje van gamaakt!" J.J. would reply. Both would laugh.

Discussing the Sunday sermons in detail was nothing new, however. Even back in the days when the Stuursmas lived east of the store it was a common thing for John to walk through the field in the dark with his lantern on Monday nights to his brother Charlie's to discuss the Sunday sermons.

To John the preaching had to be effective and the preacher was responsible for making it so. The sermon should be so effective, in fact, that it would "take you" in the pew. If one had to force himself to listen, it wasn't good preaching!

Musical Aptitudes

Preaching of the word was of utmost importance in the worship service for J.J., but singing and music was also important, and he loved it! He was not embarrassed when his voice stood far above the others in the congregational singing.

A male quartet came into being in those early years with J.J. singing tenor, brother Charlie singing lead, cousin Coen singing baritone and Jake Rus or Henry Bosveld with the base. No piano was needed, and those who remember it say that their harmony was the best. They performed occasionally in programs in the Peoria church. John could handle the high tenor with no problem.

John's enjoyment with music carried over to the instruments as well. In Holland he learned how to play the cither (zither), a stringed instrument held and played in the lap with the fingers and a pik. He played this also in America as well as led the family, friends and guests in the singing of Dutch Psalms. In addition to the cither, he also learned some skills with the accordion - sufficient enough to entertain his family which made for some enjoyable pastime.

Other church work occupied his time as well as singing. He taught the Jongeling's Vereenigen (Young Men's Society) in the Peoria Church for several years in the Dutch language, then continued with the teaching in the Protestant Reformed Church in Pella, and upon their return to the Peoria Church he resumed his former work.

Retirement

Finally the time came for the Stuursmas to move to Pella. In the fall of 1945 at the age of seventy-one, John and Dirkje moved to Pella into a house on Hazel Street which became known as the "dump house." It was a large two story house near a Pella dump from which it received its nickname. The home was far too large for the two so they rented out part of the house to another couple. Things didn't go very smoothly with the renters. The couple moved out on a Sunday morning leaving an unpaid rent bill of ninety dollars, which J.J. never collected.

The Stuursmas lived in the large house about four years during which they celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary on May 15, 1947. But in 1949 another move was made into a smaller, new home located at 408 East Franklin Street. This home was a remodeled double garage which Barney Brom had purchased and remodeled into a house with four rooms and a bath and sold to the Stuursmas.

It seemed that the years were passing quickly because on May 15, 1952, the Stuursmas celebrated their fifty-fifth wedding anniversary at the home of Gerrit and Ella Andringa in Pella. By now there were nine grandchildren to help celebrate; and for the occasion Grandpa Stuursma sang a solo with his daughter Bertha at the piano. The song he sang was one of his old time favorites, "De Kwartel" (The Quail). The family couldn't help but be impressed. His voice was still "all there" at age seventy-seven.

The Big Explosion

The house in which they were now living was unique in that it was built with no furnace but rather each room had individual gas burners for heat. No one suspected any of the trouble that lie ahead.

On Wednesday evening, April 18, 1956 at about 7:30 p.m., John and Dirkje were in the kitchen of their home. Both at age eighty-one, they were considered aged. Suddenly an explosion which sounded like a tremendous "Woo-o-m-ph!" was heard all

over town. Their frame bungalow home was blown apart, popping the outer walls off the house, allowing the roof to fall in. The Stuursmas were thrown to the floor. Immediately the house burst into flames.

Loren Perkey, a neighbor, was on the scene immediately. He heard Mrs. Stuursma calling for help, found an opening into the house, entered the kitchen area and found her lying on the floor with arms outstretched, her husband trying to aid her. Loren placed his arms under her, lifted her and carried her out. He asked Mr. Stuursma if he could walk and he replied "Ja." John walked out unassisted.

Once outside of the house others assisted in carrying Mrs. Stuursma into the office of Dr. Alvin Evers which was the adjacent brick building to the west. Dr. Evers was nearby having just left his office for the evening and was entering his car.

Dr. Evers then administered first aid in his office but was handicapped by burning window drapes, by broken window glass and by broken medicine bottles scattered over the floors.

By the time the fire trucks arrived, the flames were shooting upward twice as high as the house itself, according to Fire Chief John Hoeksema. The force of the explosion appeared to have been mostly in the directions to the south and west. It littered the street in front of the house with glass and blew one window frame to the far side of the street.

The house itself was left a mass of ruins. Nothing was saved and there was no insurance. Also lost in the ruins was J.J.'s "famous" fork!

A deputy state fire marshal, along with the Pella Fire Chief, investigated the accident the next day. They found no seepage of gas outside of the house as had been rumored, but concluded that the explosion resulted from an accumulation of gas which escaped from a manually operated heating device - that is from one of the individual room, wall mounted, heating units. What was it that ignited the gas? It could not be determined for certain. J.J. lighting his pipe was a possibility, or more likely it was Dirkje flipping on the kitchen light switch.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Stuursma were taken to Mercy Hospital in Oskaloosa as there was no hospital in Pella. Both were burned in the flash when the gas ignited. Dirkje was burned about the arms and had cuts on her face. John's face was reddened and his eyebrows and hair was singed. J.J. was given first aid and released. He returned to the scene, yet that night went to take lodging in his daughter Bertha's home near Peoria. Dirkje was confined to the hospital until Sunday when she was released her arms still bandaged.

On the morning after the accident J.J. was at the scene in his search for a metal box in which he left his valuable papers. It was found, papers intact, Thursday morning. What could he say about the whole mess? "Man in the world!"

The survival of this aged, eighty-one year old couple, was no doubt due in part to the action of Mr. Loren Perkey. A newspaper reporter asked Perkey whether he had been afraid to enter the house. He replied, "I heard Mrs. Stuursma calling and I knew they were in there and something had to be done quickly, so I went in." The newspaper reporter wrote, "Probably his presence of mind and disregard of personal safety saved the Stuursmas from more serious injury or even death."

To the Stuursmas it was a real physical, emotional and financial blow. John had said to his wife, "This is the worst thing that ever happened to me in all my years." "No," replied Dirkje, "nothing can compare to the loss of our son John."

The Stuursmas stayed by their daughter Effie in Peoria while recuperating. Soon, however, it was time for something else. The Stuursmas moved into the Home For The Aged (now called Fair Haven), while plans were being made to rebuild on the same sight. With no insurance money available, J.J. sold his farm to his son-in-law Wilbur Roose. They moved into their new home in the fall of the same year, 1956.

In May of 1957, one year after the severe gas explosion, their sixtieth wedding anniversary was upon them. It was worthy of a picture and story in The Pella Chronicle.

The Last Days

The years wore on - one by one. As the couple aged, they could no longer attend the Sunday worship services. Fortunately, for the older people, the services could be wired into the homes. J.J. appreciated this very much, for on Sunday mornings he dressed himself in his suit as if he were going to church, sat by the radio and participated in the singing, and of course, didn't miss any of the preaching!

Finally the words of Ecclesiastes 12 became real. The windows grew dim, the grinders became few in numbers, and the keepers of the house began to tremble. To complicate matters, J.J. developed a diabetic condition in the last couple of years which hastened his earthly departure. Though a man's life is spoken of as three score and ten, John J. Stuursma outlived this span. On November 13, 1960 at the age of eighty-five years, eleven months and four days, J.J. Stuursma went to be with his Lord. He left this life, full of years, in his own home and in the presence of his family. Funeral services were held on November 15 in the Van Dyke-Duven Funeral Home with Rev. Lambertus Van Laar minister. Those present sang Psalm 68 verse 2.

It is interesting to note that J.J. immigrated to this country in an impoverished condition. His way across the ocean was paid for by his cousin. He arrived in New York with thirty dollars in his pocket. By the time he arrived in Leighton, he had forty cents. At his death his estate was estimated to be eighty thousand dollars.

Dirkje was left alone and unable to care for herself. The family felt it best for her to return to Fair Haven where she and her husband had lived while their house was being rebuilt. This arrangement didn't work out. Dirkje was unhappy at Fair Haven and failed to make the adjustment to her new surroundings. Finally, Dirkje was taken out of "The Home" and spent the rest of her life in the homes of her daughters. She lived as a widow for an additional twelve and a half years. Much of her time was spent reading de Hollandse Bijbel. Her mind remained clear all of her days. She departed this life at the home of her daughter Janet on a Sunday morning at the age of ninety-eight years, one month and twenty-four days.

Jan J. (J.J.) and Dirkje Postma Stuursma Descendants

- A. John born August 12, 1898, Friesland, The Netherlands, (probably Munnikezyl); died of diphtheria Sept. 1, 1906 in Leighton, Iowa.
- B. Effie (Eke) born April 23, 1901, Friesland, The Netherlands, (probably Munnikezyl); married April 24, 1925 to Jacob Dahm, merchandiser in the Peoria Store. Jacob, born Dec. 8, 1896; died of a stroke on Nov. 27, 1979.

Children:

1. Twins born Aug. 9, 1929; died Aug. 9, 1929 and Aug. 12, 1929.
2. Dorothy Jean, born April 17, 1932; married Aug. 6, 1954 to Richard Henry Van Kooten, merchandiser in Peoria store. Richard, born Nov. 19, 1927.

Children:

- a. Cheryl Jean, born April 22, 1957; editor Lockheed Air Force Base; married July 3, 1982 to Robert Hageman, a teacher. Rob, born Jan. 10, 1955.

Children:

1. Christopher Eric, born Feb. 3, 1988.
 2. Emily Jean, born Feb. 12, 1990. *Jon Hageman*
- b. Pamela Joy, born Sept. 30, 1958; a nurse; married Aug. 15, 1980 to Kenrick Boat, a salesman. Kenrick, born May 4, 1958.

Children:

1. Brandon, born Nov. 26, 1985. *M Ashley*
2. Brenna, born Nov. 30, 1987. *-*

- c. David Ray, born May 26, 1961; a teacher; married Dec. 29, 1990 to Irene Mackus, a teacher. Irene, born Oct. 27, 1966. *Alex Andrew Rayfa*
 - d. Robert Jay, twin brother, born May 26, 1961, died May 26, 1961.
 - e. Robert Calvin, born July 10, 1967. *5 kids*
 - f. Kathy Lou, born Feb. 6, 1970. *Ryan Kyle*
3. James Peter, born Sept. 29, 1935, a dentist; married July 29, 1958 to Marlene Holleman. Marlene, born Feb. 6, 1937.

Children:

- a. Jeffrey Paul, born Nov. 17, 1964, a dentist; married Aug. 1, 1987 to Sharon Lee Byker, a music therapist. Sharon, born Aug. 29, 1966.
 - b. Jane Anne, born March 27, 1967; a secretary; married Oct. 27, 1990 to Timothy Wayne Rozendaal, a tool and die maker. Tim, born Oct. 23, 1969.
 - c. Sara Celeste, born June 12, 1973.
4. Estella Celeste, born Sept. 6, 1938; married Aug. 19, 1959 to Allen Vis, a financial services representative. Allan, born Feb. 23, 1938.

Children:

- a. Debra Lynn, born Oct. 30, 1960; married May 15, 1981 to Chad Fey, a photographer. Chad, born Jan. 29, 1961.

Children:

- 1. Ericka Danielle, born April 6, 1985.
 - 2. Elliot John, born Jan. 18, 1988.
- b. Julie Celeste, born July 27, 1963; married Aug. 26, 1989 to Ernest Henry Stellingwerff, director of Church Ministries. Ernest, born Dec. 1, 1963.

c. Trent Allen, born May 15, 1967; married Sept. 18, 1987 to Dawn Marie Smit. Dawn, born Oct. 11, 1966.

d. Melanie Ann, born March 19, 1970.

C. Ella, born Jan. 12, 1909, by Leighton, Iowa; married Feb. 18, 1931 to Gerrit Andringa, a farmer. Gerrit, born Dec. 5, 1906.

Children:

1. Gelmar James, born Sept. 30, 1932, employee of IBM; married June 8, 1961 to Carolyn Fay Schra. Carolyn, born Oct. 2, 1939.

Children:

a. Mark Glen, born Nov. 21, 1967.

b. Judy Lynn, born Sept. 6, 1969.

D. Janet, born Oct. 15, 1913 near Peoria, Iowa; married Nov. 26, 1940 to William Andringa, a farmer. William, born Jan. 30, 1914.

Children:

1. Donna Mae, born Jan. 5, 1942; married Aug. 15, 1962 to William Henry VerNooy, a farmer. William, born Feb. 26, 1942.

Children:

a. Sandra Lynn, born March 3, 1969; married Jan. 6, 1990 to Gregory Dale Vermeer, a teacher. Gregory, born March 25, 1966.

b. Lori Lee, born Nov. 13, 1971.

c. Melanie Ann, born Oct. 29, 1975.

- d. Curtis Ryan, born Nov. 26, 1978.
 - 2. Alva Jean, born Aug. 24, 1944; married Aug. 19, 1964 to Marvin Wayne De Boef, an Amway representative. Marvin, born May 28, 1944.
- Children:
- a. Jackie Lynn, born Oct. 29, 1965; married Jan. 19, 1985 to Harris Paul Westercamp, a farm laborer. Harris, born Sept. 15, 1963.
 - b. Jerry Wayne, born Nov. 15, 1968; married Aug. 11, 1990 to Kimberly Dawn Nelson. Kimberly, born Nov. 12, 1970.
 - c. Sheila Joy, born July 18, 1976.
 - d. Scott Jason, born Aug. 27, 1978.
 - 3. Linda Kay, born Aug. 1, 1952, a nurse; married June 15, 1974 to Allen D. May, an urban planner. Allen, born Feb. 12, 1952.

Children:

- a. Stuart Allen, born Sept. 20, 1977.
- b. Stacy Lynn, born July 30, 1980.
- E. Bertha, born May 22, 1918 at Peoria, Iowa; married Feb. 18, 1941 to Wilbur Roose, a farmer. Wilbur, born July 9, 1914.

Children:

- 1. Leon J., born Nov. 29, 1941, railroad retirement management; married August 26, 1965 to Jana Mellema, a social worker. Jana, born Dec. 1, 1944.
- 2. John Willis, born March 1, 1944; professor at Trinity College; married June 1, 1966 to Karen Van Andel, real estate sales. Karen, born Dec. 6, 1944.

Children:

- a. Suzanne Jane, born April 4, 1972.
 - b. Stephen William, born Oct. 27, 1973.
3. Beulah May, born March 7, 1945; married March 16, 1979 Henry Bork, a lab technician. Henry, born July 3, 1945.

Children:

- a. Bryan James, born Dec. 10, 1979.
 - b. Sandra Beth, born Nov. 18, 1981.
4. Ernie Richard, born Sept. 1, 1950, a farmer; married Dec. 27, 1976 to Esther L. Ver Meer. Esther, born March 3, 1951.

Children:

- a. Austin Richard, born June 15, 1978.
 - b. Jorden Paul, born Sept. 10, 1979.
 - c. Jameson Lee, born March 29, 1984.
 - d. Jenesse Kate, born Aug. 7, 1989.
5. Stewart, stillborn, March 12, 1955.
6. Timothy Ray, born Sept. 13, 1957, telecommunications management; married Dec. 27, 1982 to Sharon K. Van Mersbergen. Sharon, born Feb. 24, 1957.

Children:

- a. Jesse Lane, born June 21, 1990.

Date: May, 1991

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James P. Dahm, Grandson

May, 1991



